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REPORT OF THE SUB-COMMISSION ON PREVENTION OF DISCRIMINATION AND PROTECTION OF MINORITIES ON ITS FORTY-FIFTH SESSION

Written statement submitted by the International Council of Women, the International Movement ATD Fourth World, the International Social Security Association, the Soroptimist International Association, the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts and Zonta International, non-governmental organizations in consultative status (category I); the International Abolitionist Federation, the International Catholic Child Bureau, the International Confederation of Catholic Charities, the International Council of Jewish Women, the International Federation Terre des Hommes, the International Fellowship of Reconciliation, the International Federation of Women in Legal Careers, Pax Christi, Pax Romana, the World Federalist Movement, the World Federation of Methodist Women, the World Movement of Mothers, the World Union of Catholic Women's Organizations, non-governmental organizations in consultative status (category II); the Centre Europe-Tiers Monde, the International Association of Charities, the International Federation of Rural Adult Catholic Movements, the Movement against Racism and for Friendship among Peoples, the World Christian Life Community, non-governmental organizations on the Roster

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement, which is distributed in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[14 February 1993]

Human rights and extreme poverty

1. The Fourth World NGO Committee to the United Nations, at its creation in 1978, took as its aim to give a voice to the poorest. Subsequently, its members have continued to uphold, by means of their joint statements*, the need for the poorest to participate in the United Nations.

2. The signatories, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with ECOSOC, recall that, in 1992, the Fourth World NGO Committee established a working group to contribute to the study on extreme poverty and human rights by means of consultations with the poorest carried out through members and partners of those non-governmental organizations in the field.

3. These non-governmental organizations welcome:

(a) the fact that at the celebration by the United Nations of the first International Day for the Eradication of Poverty on 17 October in New York and Geneva, great emphasis was placed on the poorest. They hope that future observances of the Day, which since 1987 has been observed by the poorest and those working with them as World Day for Overcoming Extreme Poverty, will continue to keep the spotlight on the poorest, and recall that extreme poverty is a denial of human rights;

(b) the fact that the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action adopted by the World Conference on Human Rights affirmed that extreme poverty was a violation of human dignity, that urgent steps were necessary to end it and that it was essential for States to foster participation by the poorest people in the decision-making process of the community in which they lived, the promotion of human rights and efforts to combat extreme poverty;

(c) the submission to the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, by Mr. Leandro Despouy, Special Rapporteur, of his preliminary report on human rights and extreme poverty (E/CN.4/Sub.2/1993/16) and his wish to collaborate with the non-governmental organizations in carrying out his mandate, and document E/CN.4/Sub.2/1992/50 on conditions of participation of the poorest, based on the experience of Father Joseph Wresinski.

4. These non-governmental organizations:

(a) wish to draw the attention of the Commission and the Sub-Commission to the fact that the working group for the study on extreme poverty and human rights has prepared a document based on statements from very poor persons and families and those working with them. This document has been submitted to the Special Rapporteur for the study on human rights and extreme poverty as a contribution to his interim report;

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* Their 1993 statement was issued as document E/CN.4/1994/NGO/30.

(b) express the hope that, during the International Year of the Family, consideration will be given, in the context of the study on human rights and extreme poverty, to the role of the family in the promotion of human rights and the campaign against extreme poverty.

5. The document prepared by the working group for the study on extreme poverty and human rights of the Fourth World NGO Committee makes a number of points:

(a) extreme poverty is a universal phenomenon;

(b) extreme poverty is a grave violation of human dignity;

(c) the denial of one right frequently makes it impossible to exercise other rights; that is a daily experience of the poorest and makes plain the interdependence and indivisibility of human rights;

(d) the existence of efforts and aspirations, frequently unrecognized, on the part of the poorest. They are, nevertheless, the first to confront poverty and to attempt to overcome it. Knowledge of such efforts is needed in order to see the ways shown to us by the poorest in the fight against extreme poverty and to allow them to participate in building a world where there is greater justice and human rights may be enjoyed by all.

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